

MAKING THE SHIFT TO PEOPLE POWERED SERVICES: A CROSS-GOVERNMENT AGENDA

There is growing support amongst politicians and public servants for the idea that citizen participation should be central to public services. But while there are many good examples of people powered services, they are the exception rather than the norm. To achieve further change, we need a cultural shift – a change in attitudes towards the role of public services and perceptions about how public services should act. Co-production and community participation should be built into the way that public services are designed and commissioned. By doing this we can open up many more services to benefit from additional community resources, as well as offering new ideas and models for service delivery.

Policy makers can support this in two ways: by encouraging and incentivising public services to develop new approaches with People Power at their core, and by testing ways of normalising volunteering and making it more widespread. These tasks demand action from across government, and require changes to the way we think about the national support infrastructure for community participation.

1. Create a new executive agency with funding and other powers, responsible for embedding civic participation throughout public services and communities.

- Policy implementation should be freed from political cycles, which risk institutional memory loss and reinvented wheels. It is time for a new approach.
- The government should set up a new executive agency with responsibility for embedding civic participation in public services and communities. Its core functions should be to:
 - Champion and promote civic participation and volunteering in and alongside public services.
 - Run funding programmes to promote volunteering and participation, and develop, pilot and scale new approaches to embedding civic participation in public services.
 - Provide technical support to public services and non-profit organisations looking to put citizen participation at the core of their models.
 - Generate robust evidence and learning on effective practice and impact.

- A Secretary of State should be given responsibility for oversight of government policy and strategy for civic participation. The role of implementation would fall to the new agency, with a robust and transparent accountability framework to ensure it remains answerable to government.

2. Give employees the right to ask for time off for voluntary roles.

- At present, employers must, by law, allow staff time off for jury service and for magistrate duty. Employers do not have to pay staff while acting as a juror or magistrate, but many do. Staff can also request a 'reasonable' amount of time off for a range of other specific public duties, such as being a school governor.
- The ability to ask for a 'reasonable' amount of time off for public duties should be extended to all voluntary roles. As per the existing guidelines for public duties, the amount of time off should be agreed between employer and employee, and should take into account the amount of time the voluntary role might take, prior amounts of time taken off and the potential impact on the business. Employers would not have to accept requests, but employees must not be disadvantaged for requesting, or taking, reasonable time off for voluntary roles.

3. Introduce a Year of Paid Service offer for uniformed public servants approaching pension age.

- Fire fighters, police and other uniformed public servants within five years of normal pension age should be offered the chance to take a 'sabbatical' year working in volunteering roles and other forms of civic participation. This should not affect pension entitlements.

4. The National Commissioning Academy should produce practical management and commissioning tools for commissioners to help them embed civic participation in service delivery models.

- Public sector commissioners should be provided with tools and guidelines focused on commissioning interventions that mobilise citizens and on structuring procurement processes in a way that actively removes the barriers which prevent small VCSE organisations from participating. This should include pathways for local commissioners to co-develop interventions in partnership with VCSEs, while remaining in accordance with EU procurement rules. Tools and guidelines should be applicable to different sectors.